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## GSU Physical Therapy Students Flex Their Political Muscles

University Park, Illinois, April 2, 2007 – Learning the muscles of the body and the therapies that help mend and make them strong again are the usual lessons taught to students of physical therapy at Governors State University.

This March, students in Assistant Professor Dr. Rebecca Wojcik’s Ethical, Leadership, and Policy Dimensions of Physical Therapy course learned another very important lesson. They experienced first-hand the effectiveness of a well-crafted argument and the passion to persuade.

Eight students in the Master of Physical Therapy program at GSU and Wojcik participated in a lobby day at the State Capital coordinated by the Illinois Physical Therapy Association. During their day in Springfield, the students met with their state representatives and senators to discuss proposed legislation that would effect the delivery of physical therapy services.

“It was a very exciting day for the students. They had the chance to talk to their elected officials on issues that are important to them and to their profession. They had the chance to be real advocates,” said Wojcik.

“They also had the opportunity to witness how our government works from committee hearings to a full House debate,” she added. “They learned from professional lobbyists how to make their points clearly and concisely and were able to network with other physical therapists.”

The students and their professor were in Springfield to lobby against a bill that would have limited the function and scope of physical therapy and to lobby for a bill that would expand access to physical therapy services.

“This was a really good experience. We saw how the process works, listened to the senators debate, and even witnessed a vote on legislation,” said one of the GSU students, Amanda McClure of Manteno. “I had the opportunity to speak with my state senator, Debbie Halvorson (D-40), and let her know how these issues would effect her constituents and others in Illinois.”

P.T. student Mary Jones of Shorewood was surprised at how accessible her representatives were. “My representative, Tom Cross (R-84), was very busy the day we were there, but his staff took the time to hear my speaking points, and he then personally followed up with me the next day. So even though you may not meet the rep or senator personally, I learned that your voice is still heard.”

Each of the students also found that the legislators they spoke with to be both accessible and interested in the issues they came to discuss.

Students Vince Gutierrez of Elwood and Krystal Ferrari of Manhattan met with both State Senator A.J. Wilhelmi (D-43) and State Representative Jack McGuire (D-86).

“I had no idea that they were so accessible. We had the opportunity to sit down and talk to them and explain. They listened and asked questions,” said Ferrari.

“I never realized what law makers really do. It was interesting. I would love to get involved in politics now,” added Gutierrez. “I realized they need accurate information to debate these issues. I feel we can provide that information.”

The students also learned that their efforts were effective. According to the students, the proposed piece of legislation, which would have limited the services offered by physical therapists (Senate Bill 617), was withdrawn from consideration and Senate Bill 1626, which would expand access to physical therapist services, was referred to committee.

“We did have a strong voice and action took place because of what we did. I learned I can make a difference,” said Ferrari.

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